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ABSTRACT

The ways in which time is utilized can be enhanced through careful management. The time to be allocated to various activities and objectives should be planned on a weekly basis in light of consciously set priorities. Commonly used but rarely useful strategies for time management include working faster and working longer, both of which lead to errors and fatigue. A study of the way great leaders utilize time revealed that such leaders are systematic and effective planners and decision-makers who are able to delegate responsibilities. Administrators seeking to manage their time efficiently should conduct assessments of their own use of time and the common traps into which they fall. Maintaining good physical and psychological condition is essential. Failure to accomplish objectives may not be a result of poor use of time, but may indicate that too many activities were scheduled, that task requirements were not sufficiently analyzed, or that too much time is being consumed by the minor unplanned activities. (PGD)

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INCREASING PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

TREATISE NO. 4

"TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES"

NEW MEXICO RESEARCH AND STUDY COUNCIL
214 ONATE HALL, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO 87131
(505) 277-2621

EA 017 754

The New Mexico Research and Study Council adopted its Constitution on January 14, 1959, with sixteen public school districts, the State Department of Education, and the University of New Mexico becoming charter members. Today, the Council is fifty-six members strong, and is celebrating, during this 1983-84 school year, twenty-five years of educational service to New Mexico's youth.

The Council is an organization designed specifically to facilitate cooperative study and solution of educational concerns. Through the combined resources, assistance, and direction of members, the Council strives to improve and expand elementary and secondary education in New Mexico.

This publication represents the Council's first effort at celebrating this auspicious occasion, the Silver Anniversary Year of the New Mexico Research and Study Council.

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June 1, 1983

PREFACE

Six edifying and thoughtful expositive papers are being distributed to the educational administrators of New Mexico as one of several special Twenty-fifth Anniversary efforts of the New Mexico Research and Study Council. The personal and organizational topics and their approximate 1983 publication dates are as follows:

1. Understanding Organizational Patterns (April 15)
2. Characteristics of Effective Organizations (May 1)
3. Understanding Sources of Organizational Conflict And Conflict Management Strategies (May 15)
4. Time Management Techniques (June 1)
5. Maintaining Successful Communications (June 15)
6. Promoting The Organization (July 1)

We owe thanks to the American Association of School Administrators and its National Academy For School Executives for providing the impetus which led us to the development of this series of abstracts. The Council had initially hoped to participate in the Academy's July 1983 Colorado Springs seminar titled "Increasing Personal And Organizational Effectiveness", but when legislated school budget reductions made such an educational experience an impossibility for 1983, we utilized the Academy's seminar description as the basis for preparing these treatises.

The papers were initially researched and drafted by Bea Davis, a Council graduate assistant, as her primary assistantship assignment during the spring

semester of 1983. Bea and I "polished" the papers, and release them as Council publications envisioning that practicing school administrators will utilize them as useful self-education and staff-education conveyances.

Superintendents, after reading each treatise, are encouraged to have the six compendia placed in a three-ring binder or other easy-to-use professional library reference folder and to share the publications with subordinates and other key faculty and staff members.

Preparing papers for colleagues to read (and critique) is a weighty task. I appreciate the effort put forth by Bea Davis in encapsulating in a relatively brief set of papers an extensive, multifarious and utilitarian array of views, concepts, and principles applicable to the everyday thoughts and endeavors of both administrative theorists and practitioners.

Dr. Richard F. Tonigan

TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

SETTING PRIORITIES

The great French writer and philosopher, Voltaire, once asked, "What, of all things in the world, is the longest and the shortest, the swiftest and the slowest, the most divisible and the most extended, the most neglected and the most regretted, without which nothing can be done, which devours all that is little and enlivens all that is great?" The answer is "time".

Time is merely a measurement of intervals, a constant that moves at the same fixed rate regardless of human misconceptions about managing it. Nonetheless, the concept of "managing" time is central to effective administration, especially in an organization pressed by the disparate and consuming demands of education.

The amount of time available to each person is unchangeable. The quality of time available to each person, however, is a major variable in effective management. The ways in which time is utilized can be enhanced through careful planning. But often people plan only activities, and overlook planning time. Planning time means setting a time frame or a time limit for each task. Time management experts generally recommend that this type of planning occur at least once a week, writing down objectives, tasks, and time requirements for each objective.

Effective time management also requires conscious priority setting for all activities. Everything accomplished during the day involves a priority decision, but many of these decisions are not made thoughtfully and therefore do not accurately reflect established objectives. Many criteria are used in

determining priorities; considerations include the demands of others, the closeness of deadlines, the amount of time available, the degree of enjoyment and familiarity, and the order of arrival. While determining priorities is a difficult task, it is important to note that there are basically only two choices available. One is to establish our priorities consciously and the other is to unconsciously react to myriad demands as they occur. While administrators may not always establish the best priorities, performances can be increased with careful attention.

COMMON ERRORS

Administrators have experimented with a variety of time management strategies. One pervasive tactic is the attempt to work faster and to hurry through scheduled and unscheduled tasks. Although occasionally working faster can be both productive and provide an immediate solution, this strategy promotes mistakes, sloppiness, and personal exhaustion. Allowing less time to think, plan and reflect before action can have very destructive long-range results.

When acceleration fails, administrators often adopt a second potentially problematic strategy. They simply work longer and longer hours. This approach is, of course, required of all executives on occasion, but when it becomes a regular occurrence, problems often result. Physical and mental fatigue can occur producing poor judgment, frenzied responses, and reduced patience. Employees become victims of this syndrome, as administrators adopt hostile attitudes that produce for other employees a very nonproductive and antanonistic work environment. No matter how fast or how long an administrator works, there will always be more work. Both of these approaches doom a person to frustration,

disappointment, and disillusionment. Organizational climate deteriorates and work quality degenerates. Long range goals are often sacrificed, as immediate pressures take precedence over the more important, less immediate considerations of an effective organization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT LEADERS

In an article in The School Administrator (January 1983), Ron Abrell reported on a ten year research study designed to determine how great leaders manage their time. Based both on biographical studies and personal interviews, he makes some interesting generalizations regarding the process of time management.

Abrell found that leaders who are successful are generally persons with deep idealism and noble purpose. These individuals are action oriented, and devoted to conscious goals. They are extremely aware of the importance of time, viewing it as a precious commodity to be guarded carefully. Outstanding leaders are systematic and effective planners, with organizational skills that excell in time management. Because they know precisely what they wish to accomplish, they pursue their goals with definite commitment and deliberation. They arrange within their demanding schedules for time to plan further schedules, which include goals, objectives, tasks, deadlines, and evaluation. While possessed with many ideas, they are quick to choose the important ones and plan around accomplishing them.

This researcher also found that energy levels of great leaders are usually higher than normal, and their enthusiasm for work is generally quite high also. They do not procrastinate, but rather are quick and effective decision

makers. Successful time management for these leaders also entails the ability to delegate a great deal of responsibility and work to others. Knowing their own strengths and weaknesses helps them to include specialists and consultants at appropriate times. This skill is also demonstrated in their ability to provide relevant information, and clear guidelines to employees.

Some surprising results of this study include the discovery that great leaders generally keep their desks very clear of clutter and they also do not spend much time on the telephone. Phone calls are usually organized into a particular block of time, which allows larger blocks of undisturbed time for other work.

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

To become an effective manager of work time, every administrator should take time for personal assessment. In particular, the effective administrator must look for common time traps within his/her schedule and learn to avoid them. Knowledge of common time traps and awareness of strategies for their avoidance can assist executives in attempts to increase work effectiveness.

Demands on administrators create demands on their health. Good health is fundamental to effective leadership and must be actively protected. Time management should always include daily time allocated to health maintenance. Strategies to promote good health can include planned exercise breaks, perhaps in lieu of the more traditional coffee break. Whenever possible, it is advisable to get out of the office and the building; stretching and relaxing muscles and deep breathing exercises are highly recommended.

In addition to exercise breaks, it is also advised that administrators

schedule a definite exercise program into their routines. Many executives find that early morning exercise programs get them started in a vigorous and effective way. Nutritious diets that are well balanced and eaten in a relaxed environment, are also extremely important, as is sleeping soundly and for an appropriate amount of time.

Along with proper care for the health of the body, one must also be alert to proper care for the emotional, psychological self. Tension, stress, and worry are not only detrimental to one's health, they are also robbers of time. Strategies for coping with these problems include using physical releases like exercise to dissipate anger or worry, talking about the problems that create these feelings with a trusted friend, and doing something kind for someone else. Concentrating for a while on the dimensions of your life that are running smoothly and taking time to appreciate them can also be a constructive strategy. According to one study[1] examining the things people worry about, 40 percent of the worrisome concerns never materialized, 35 percent were things that could not be changed, 15 percent turned out better than expected, 8 percent were petty, useless worries, and only 2 percent were categorized as legitimate worries.

Another emotional time trap is a disappointed, restless feeling commonly called the "blues". Time gets consumed in self-pity and/or lethargy. This situation should be examined to look for underlying causes, which could be physical as well as psychological.

Often this feeling results from a steady routine of work. Taking time off, going on a vacation, or just easing up on yourself can alleviate the

1)Reynolds, Tramel, Executive Time Management, pg. 155

problem. A break in your normal routine, as well as other indulgences and pampering, is beneficial.

Home, family, and friends are special ingredients in the successful maintenance of time for an administrator. Family and friends can serve both as a support and an escape. Their neglect usually translates into an important loss of potential strength, including time lost in frustration, upheaval, or alienation. Effective managers, according to many time management experts, allow themselves a private life, away from their jobs. This activity provides an extra source of strength and stamina that can be viewed as a very important resource.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

There are a variety of reasons an administrator might not accomplish all the objectives that have been set. Finding these reasons can be helpful to future planning. One reason a planned schedule might not work is because too much was initially scheduled. Reviewing and evaluating accomplishments can help to determine reasonable future expectations. Some objectives might not have been clearly or fully formulated. An administrator could be expending time on a task without sufficiently analyzing the task and without being prepared to accomplish it. Another reason for failing to keep on schedule is failure to pay attention to priorities. Day-to-day demands constantly undermine an administrator's intentions to address priority concerns. Breakdowns in communication within the organization can also destroy the most carefully planned schedules.

Executives are also required to make many personal decisions on small,

fairly insignificant matters. Sometimes it is these small decision making episodes that consume an unreasonable acount of a person's time and can be another time trap. Many of these small decisions are forced upon a person on a daily basis and could be reorganized as one larger item. Deciding what to wear can fall into this category. One strategy for these daily routines is to plan a week in advance. For example, planning a wardrobe for the week can consolidate decision making time into one process at one time.

Attacking these problems in a constructive manner requires the effective executive to be healthy, committed, energetic, positive, and self-confident. With careful planning, setting objectives, and making time lines for accomplishment, managers can increase their effectiveness by increasing the quality of their time at work and at home.